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Fleur de Valeur: A Medieval Bouquet
Bargemusic, September 10, 2011

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| Quant voi flor novele La Tierche Estampie Roial | Anon. 13 th c. Trouvère (BN Ms X) Anon. 13 th c. French (Chansonnier de Roy) |
| Cantiga 10: Rosa das Rosas Motet: Amours mi font souffrir piene a tort/ En mai, quant rose est florie/ Flos Filus Eius (Instrumental) | Alfonso X, El Sabio (1221 – 1284) Anon. 13 th c. French (Montpellier Codex) |
| Rose cui nois ne gelée | Anon. 13 th c. Trouvère (BN Ms V) |
| Ballata: O Rosa Bella O Rosa Bella O Rosa Bella | Johannes Ciconia (fl. 1390 – 1410) Anon., after John Dunstable, Buxheim Organ Book (c.1450-70) John Dunstable (c. 1390 – 1453) |

Intermission

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| Sus une fontayne remirant | Ciconia |
| Margarite fleur de valeur N'a pas longtemps que trouvoy Zephirus Flos florum | Gilles Binchois (c. 1400 – 1460) Anon. French, ca. 1380 - 1400 Guillaume Dufay (1397 – 1474) |
| Estampida: Kalenda Maya (Instrumental) Flos Regalis | Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (fl. 1180 – 1207) Anon. English ca. 1300 |

Notes on Tonight's Program

Like poets of all ages, medieval songwriters employed the imagery of flowers to depict feminine beauty. Our program this evening uses the Rose, or *fleur de valeur* as an organizing principle; we have gathered stems from several centuries, styles, and nations to assemble an exotic bouquet of musical riches from the troubadours and trouvères to the late medieval chansons and motets of Ciconia, Dunstable, Dufay and Binchois. Our program also reveals a glimpse of the cooperation and admiration between composers and poets of England, France, Castile, and Italy, who flourished by reworking and varying each other's ideas in the vibrant, international musical scene of the late 14th and early 15th centuries.

The thirteenth-century French trouvères inherited the musical forms of their southern antecedents, the troubadours. While much of the trouvères' poetic creativity was devoted to extolling the virtues of secular love, a number of devotional songs appear scattered throughout their manuscripts. Both *Quant voi flor novele* and *Rose cui nois ne gelée* laud Mary rather than a buxom young shepherdess or an unattainable noblewoman. The poets address Mary the Intercessor, who prays for those who await the Last Judgment, using as many images as possible to compare her to beautiful gems, lovely flowers, and exotic mythical creatures with magical powers. In a similar vein, Alfonso X's Cantiga compilation contains the lovely *Rosa das Rosas*, in which the singer swears to be Mary's *trobador*, forswearing carnal love.

The polyphonic style of the 13th century *ars antiqua* is exemplified in a motet from the *Montpellier Codex*. In the vocal original, two secular French love-poems are added above a repeated, slower moving scrap of a Gregorian chant (*Flos Filius Eius*). The early 14th century English *Flos Regalis*, is a *rondellus* or round-song, in which the singers trade their phrases, alternating their melodic roles in a kaleidoscopic pattern while retaining the same harmonic relationships of each part to the whole. While its rhythmic language is antique, based largely on the rhythmic patterns (modes) of Parisian music written for Notre Dame in the 12th century, its harmonic language is English, infused with that nation's long-standing use of the sweet sounds of major and minor triads. In the fifteenth century, the poet Martin le Franc claimed that Dufay and Binchois were influenced by the sonorous chords of their English contemporary John Dunstable.

Purely instrumental music is scarce before the advent of printing in the fifteenth century. *La tierche estampie Roial* is an example of the instrumental

dance music found in the *chansonnières* or songbooks of the Trouvères. Little is known about the performance of these melodies, which exist without accompaniment and whose dance steps are still unknown. In the fifteenth century *Buxheimer Orgelbüch* we find a style of composition called *intabulation*, or instrumental variation. The first manuscript examples of these works appears in scattered sources and in the *Faenza Codex* compiled at the turn of the fifteenth century, and the style of writing continues long into the Renaissance, forming the basis of the first printed lute music published by Petrucci in Venice in the beginning of the next century. The intabulation of *O Rosa Bella* is based on Dunstable's setting of the text, and its florid cantus part (played on the gittern) mirrors the original more closely than in some arrangements of secular songs in the period. While we know from poetry and visual art that instrumentalists played together, we hardly know what actual music they played for most of the period before printed music appears. The text of Raimbaut's famous *Kalenda Maya* refers to itself as an *estampida*, so it makes sense to present it in an arrangement for citole and harps. This desperate, lovesick poem is set in the season where love rules all and so many shoots burst into bloom.

A medieval pleasure garden provides the setting for Johannes Ciconia's masterful virelai *Sus une fontayne*, a supreme example of the *ars subtilior* style. The fountain was a central feature of the medieval garden, situated on a hill of wildflowers. The overflowing musical ingenuity and the delightfully chaotic melodic arabesques of the chanson seem designed to ensnare the listener in a web of fascination, much as flowing water can catch the eye and calm the viewer into a reverie. All three vocal melodies evade temporal regularity, constantly changing meters against one another to create a kaleidoscopic texture. Of particular interest are the sudden, held triads, a feature that seems to have continued and developed further in the music of Dufay's generation. Amazingly, the composition is also a sort of medieval *musique concrète*, as it is actually a pastiche (or a bouquet of admiration) stitched together from the incipient phrases of several compositions by Ciconia's elder contemporary Philipoctus de Caserta. Whether Ciconia studied with Caserta or merely admired his compositions is impossible to know. It is reasonable to conjecture that these composers met through their mutual connections to the Milanese Visconti court or the papal court in Avignon. Ciconia's choice of quotations is yet another example of the medieval obsession with transforming existing material into something entirely new.

Dufay's *Flos Florum* is a cantilena – a florid, Marian song freely written to a devotional text. Such devotional songs were quite common in Italy during Dufay's early sojourn there. The vocal virtuosity of this work and Ciconia's *O*

Rosa Bella share many stylistic elements with the instrumental roulades and patterns of *Faenza* and *Buxheim*, revealing the high skill demanded of sacred singers in the period. Ciconia's *O Rosa Bella* also revels in its repeated emotional exclamations of "Ay! Lasso me" and "O Dio d'Amore", and unlike the prismatic, French polyphony of *Sus une fontayne*, its musical phrasing is primarily drawn from the rhythm of its Italian text. Here, the poet is laid so low by the power of his lady's love, and loses his poise so thoroughly that he must beg for her mercy – a typical conceit in *fin amors*. To pluck a rose, after all, one has to avoid its thorns and often gets wounded in the bargain.

According to poetic tradition, the Marguerite, or Daisy, was a flower that was beloved above all others due to its love of the sun-god Apollo. Poets from Machaut to Chaucer wrote poems based on this conceit. These poems were often occasional: Many royal beauties were named Marguerite, including Marguerite de Bourgogne, who was the subject of a dedicatory wedding poem written by Eustache Déschamps in 1385. When Gilles Binchois describes this flower as "sovereign above any other flower," he is contributing to a rich musical-poetic tradition that stretches back into the middle of the previous century. Comparisons can easily be made between *N'a pas longtemps* and Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* which describes the inclination of the Daisy to follow the sun (Phoebus) during the day. Perhaps even more directly, Chaucer's "good women" are all members of tragic couples from ancient literature, and *N'a pas longtemps* just happens to mention Paris and Helen. The poet is taken by the Daisy's humility and devotion to Apollo, however, and elevates it to a status more human, and seemingly more important than that of the courtly Rose.